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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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MEET THE "VIROID"

PROCUREMENT SECTION
CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

A New Piece For The Puzzle Of Disease. A new kind of disease-producing particle has been isolated and identified by a USDA pathologist. The particle, smaller than a virus and dubbed "viroid," may be the culprit that has eluded scientists in their search for causes of some human diseases. The new particle, described as a very small molecule of free RNA (ribonucleic acid), was found to be the cause of potato spindle tuber disease. A virus was the suspect in this disease, but until now, the causative agent had eluded scientists. With the discovery of the viroid, USDA scientists are convinced that other plant, animal and human diseases whose causes have eluded the probing of science are probably caused by viroids. They speculate that human diseases such as multiple sclerosis, infectious hepatitis, and possibly some types of cancers for which science has not yet identified the causative agent, all appear to have some common properties that lead to the suspicion of a viroid origin.

ENVIRONMENTAL THRUST

Doing Something. . . Now. USDA employees in the more than 3,000 counties in the United States have been directed by Secretary Clifford M. Hardin to "lend all possible support" to individuals, communities, groups and organizations, volunteer leaders, and local and State governments to help reverse the trend of degradation of our environment. The directive is basic to the nationwide USDA environmental campaign designed to provide help in first initiating and then carrying out community-wide activities in environmental quality. Termed, "Environmental Thrust," the campaign will muster all available resources of the agricultural community to provide educational, organizational, and technical assistance. . . while stressing citizen effort and local determination in developing environmental improvement programs. If you have a suggestion, a good idea for a specific project, or questions to ask, get in touch with a local USDA office, such as the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, or the Cooperative Extension Service. They are listed in your telephone book under the heading for local government or U.S. Government. A leaflet outlining the campaign, "Environmental Thrust: Citizen Projects for A Better America" (PA985) is available from the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.



IQB TO THE RESCUE

Saves Nutrients And Avoids Pollution. Valuable nutrients, leached out of vegetables during blanching with steam or hot water, often become serious pollutants in the output from processing plants. An experimental blanching method, conceived by USDA researchers, can retain up to 90 percent of these nutrients -- to the nutritional and environmental benefit of the consumer. The reason for blanching vegetables in the first place is to cook the product long enough to stop enzyme action that would lower food quality by discoloring it and breaking it down in storage. The new method, called individual quick blanching (IQB), puts vegetable pieces through a steam chamber in single layers, rather than in the conventional deep piles or layers. They are held in the chamber for only partial steam penetration then conveyed into an isolated chamber for the heat to redistribute and penetrate to the interior of each piece. The time exposure to the high heat is cut down and overcooking is avoided. Preliminary taste tests rated frozen and cooked IQB carrots better than conventionally blanched carrots, because IQB carrots had a firmer texture. The IQB method will be tested in both canning and frozen food processing plants during the 1971 season.

A NEW POWDERED MILK PRODUCT

It Tastes Good For A Long Time. Chemists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service have developed a new powdered milk product that tastes good and keeps its flavor. It tastes like fresh milk when first reconstituted and retains an acceptable flavor in powdered form for months even without refrigeration. Dried milk sometimes develops off-flavors -- from exposure of the milk fat to air, from high pasteurization temperatures before drying, or from long storage. The method used by the USDA chemists involved deodorizing the milk fat separately, then recombining it with pasteurized skim milk -- all the time protecting the fat from exposure to air. The recombined product was then concentrated and dried by the foam spray process. After refrigeration for six months, only a few experts can distinguish it from fresh milk. Even without refrigeration, the flavors remains good -- actually better than that of control powders made from fresh milk and stored under refrigeration.

FROM GARDEN TO TABLE

Families Share Work and Harvest. Community gardens in which families work together and share the crops, are helping low-income families in Mississippi put more food on the table. Aides employed in Extension Service's Expanded Food and Nutrition Program organized the gardens, getting local residents and businesses to donate some of the needed funds and supplies. Participating homemakers work in the gardens almost daily; one woman walked eight miles each way from her home to her community garden. Families are shown how to harvest and can their home-grown foods. Head Start children and others are invited to see the gardens and to learn how food results in good nutrition. A total of 62 families or more than 300 individuals are benefitting from the project in Carrollton, Black Hawk, and Vaiden, Mississippi. The Extension Service now has more than 10,000 aides -- women who live in the communities in which they work -- teaching hard-to-reach poor families how to feed their families more nutritious meals, get more food for their money, use available resources, and improve their food preparation skills. For more information on the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program, contact your local Extension office.

NEW USDA CONSUMER EDUCATION GUIDE

On Teaching Meat And Poultry Safeguards. Proper ways to buy, handle, and cook meat and poultry products are covered in a new teaching guide from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In developing the guide, USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service kept in mind teachers of home economics and related fields, Extension agents working with nutrition education, leaders of consumer education groups, and other such persons. The guide gives suggested learning experiences; sample tests, and topical background information on the steps inspectors take to help insure the wholesomeness of meat and poultry products. Among the three sections of the guide are units on teaching label reading for wise, economical buying and steps consumers can take to keep meat and poultry safe for eating at home. Lists of resources materials--publications, films, posters, and tabletop exhibits -- are included. Copies of "Inspection, Labeling, and Care of Meat and Poultry -- A Consumer Education Guide," (AH-416) are available for 50 cents each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

SOME MORE ABOUT MEAT AND POULTRY

Addendum To Safeguards. A new color movie, released just in time to fit nicely as resource for the new USDA consumer education guide (see above) provides some valuable insights into what government does to help assure the safety of the Nation's meat and poultry supply. Equally important, it shows the shopping, handling, storage, and preparation steps that consumers can take to get the best buys and to insure the safety in meat and poultry products. The 18-minute film, "That The Best Will Be Ours," traces the growth and development of Federal meat and poultry inspection from its beginning in 1906. It shows exacting handling, processing, and labeling requirements that meat and poultry packers must heed, and the inspection controls that insure the requirements are met. For information on borrowing or buying prints of the film, write Motion Picture Service, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

NUTRITION EDUCATION VIA VIDEO

Series For Food Service Workers. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced plans to produce an educational television series on nutrition which could be used by states in accreditation programs for school food service personnel. The 10-program series, which will be completed next year, will stress the importance of improving the diets of children and youth and of the nutritional requirements for growth and development. While the series is aimed primarily at school food service workers, it proposes also to communicate nutrition information to others, especially parents, to assist them in maintaining the total health of the child. In addition to the program broadcasts, a structured course with course materials and tests will be provided for school food service workers. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service is funding the project by contract with the New England State Educational Council. Experts from Harvard University will serve as content consultants and the series will be produced by Station WGBH-TV, Boston. After televising in the six states comprising the New England Educational Council, the series will be available to other states.

NATURAL FIBER IS IN

The Situation About Cotton. Teenagers have a craving for all things natural, including cotton. They go for cotton in two of its plainest, more rugged forms -- denim and corduroy. These old-fashioned fabrics have antique names of French origin. Blue denim was first known as "serge de Nimes," after the factory town which produced it, while softer corduroy was none other than "cord du roi" -- the king's cloth. Today's denim and corduroy fashions are definitely American, and definitely "in," translated into colorful mod apparel ranging from bellbottoms to hot pants. Eagerness for these fabrics is evident; American cotton mills in the last half of 1970 and early 1971 turned out half again as much denim and a third more corduroy than a year before. This added output used cotton grown on nearly 200,000 acres of land, about a 300-square mile expanse!

PLENTIFUL FOODS LIST

What's It All About? Through the Plentiful Foods Program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture keeps consumers and all segments of the food industry informed about foods expected to be in abundant supply and needing marketing help. The monthly lists are compiled by USDA commodity specialists from fact-finding sources available in government and the food industry. All this fact-finding has resulted in some mouth-watering Plentifuls for October: fresh apples, canned applesauce and apple juice, fresh pears, canned pears, potatoes, pork, and eggs. For November, the Plentiful Foods List will include rice, pork, potatoes and potato products, prunes and prune juice, apples, applesauce, apple juice, cranberries, cranberry sauce, cranberry juice cocktail, fresh and canned pears, turkeys, eggs, and broiler-fryers.

BULBS THAT BLOOM IN THE SPRING

Tra La. . . Spring flowering bulbs are hardy plants that require little care. They provide early color in the garden or yard -- planted in borders, grouped for large masses of color, or scattered in lawns and among shrubs as ground cover. Some make excellent flowering plants for indoors garden arrangements. In most areas, spring flowering bulbs should be planted in the fall so the roots can develop before the ground freezes. "Spring Flowering Bulbs" (G-136), a bulletin prepared by horticulturists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service, discusses selection of bulbs, planting, care, and forcing. The 14-page publication includes charts and illustrations and mentions the well-known spring bloomers -- tulip, jonquil, crocus -- and some of the uncommon ones -- squill, oxalis, winter aconite. "Spring Flowering Bulbs" is available for 15 cents a copy from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Lillie Vincent, Editor of Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone (202) DU8-5437. Please include your zipcode.